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Parshas Aikev, 23 Av, 5782

Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman *Dedicated in Honor of the Wedding of Tziona Esther Hoffman to Chaim Weber* August 20, 2022

### On the Parsha

In this week's Parsha, we find two separate admonitions not to forget Hashem. The first is found in the very beginning of the second Aliyah. The second is just three verses later- after the psukim mention the attainment of great wealth. Why is this concern of "forgetting Hashem" mentioned twice? It seems to be an unnecessarily redundancy!

The Gemorah in Sotah (5a) records a debate between Rav Nachman and Rava as to what the source is for the prohibition of exhibiting gaavah – arrogance. Rav Nachman points to the seemingly repetitious two verses in the second Aliyah of the parsha. One serves as a warning and the second serves as the prohibition itself. However, Rava explains the source of the prohibition as coming from a verse in Yirmiyahu (13:15) - "Hear, you, and give ear, be not proud, for the Hashem has spoken."

Rava, however, clearly does not derive a prohibition from this section of the Psukim. What then is the explanation for the redundancy in the Psukim?

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (1818-1893), the Netziv, provides a fascinating answer (HeEmek Davar Dvarim 8:12). He writes that there are two reasons why a person could *chas veshalom* come to forget Hashem. One reason, referred to in the latter pasuk is that which is a consequence of great wealth. One of the dangers of wealth and the feeling of complete satisfaction is the seduction of the heart that comes as a consequence of these mindsets.

But, there is also another underlying cause of "forgetting Hashem." That cause, explains the Netziv, is the exposure to the falsehoods, and outright lies of the philosophers and theorists that are estranged from G-d.

Examples abound. In the time of the Netziv, who was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Volozhin Yeshiva, the thinking of these theorists was that man was not

created by a Benevolent Creator of it all, but evolved from chemical reactions. The current thinking of secular-minded theorists is that there is no such thing as free will. They state that there is no ability of human beings to choose the more moral choice. Everything, in their opinion is controlled by brain chemistry in their false take on things. Thus, no one is truly at fault for anything he or she has done. Other theorists now write that not only is adultery not immoral, but monogamy itself is immoral.

These false thoughts and lies espoused by the "thinkers," "theorists," and secular philosophers of each period in history can serve heaven forbid to deter us from our purpose in life. The first pasuk thus warns us to stay far away from the deceptive lies of such people. According to the Netziv, **we now have a new source pasuk (8:11) that deals with how far we should stay away from lies and deceptions.**

This thought can be further informed by the first Rashi in Aikev - combined with a familiar statement of Chazal in Pirkei Avos. Rashi explains that the word "Aikev" which means "heel" - connotes the idea that if we are careful with the "light Mitzvos" in which people generally trample upon with their "heel" – then Hashem will fulfill the bargain which he made with our forefathers. The Pirkei Avos (2:1) provides a reason why we should observe the "light Mitzvos" as carefully as we observe the "heavy Mitzvos." It is because we do not know which ones are which. Exposure to the lies and deceptive thinking of secular theorists can, Heaven forbid, cause us to abandon Hashem and lead a life of moral depravity. It is a very delicate balance that must be observed.

### Chizuk - Inspiration

The country of Poland had completely disappeared from 1795 for 123 years. In 1918, it finally reappeared amid unprecedented pride of Polish nationalism. Rav Boruch Ber Liebowitz zt"l was the Rosh Yeshiva of the Kamenetz Yeshiva. He was the top student of Rav Chaim Soloveitchik and was known for his absolute devotion to emes.

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Once, while trying to re-enter the newly reconstituted Poland from the newly reconstituted Lithuania (Poland’s enemy) he was questioned at the border as to whether or not he was a citizen of the new Republic of Poland. Although he could have easily told the nationalistic border officer that he was a citizen, he refused to do so. He said, “Officer, I am not a citizen. But most of my students are Polish citizens and it is my greatest joy to teach them. Won’t you please allow me in so that I can do that?”

The officer noted the sincerity and integrity of Rav Boruch Ber zt”l and decided to allow him into the country. When one is devoted to everyday emes in every aspect of life, miracles happen on a daily basis.

### Halacha – Jewish Law

Is lying in writing the same as lying orally? Rav Yavrov zt”l cites a letter from Rav Meir Dan Plotzki zt”l (1866-1928), the author of the Kli Chemda (\*not found in his comments on Chumash), who writes to an author that draws an implication from the words of the Maharsha in Bava Basra 15a – that there is no prohibition of lying in writing. The author of the letter to the Kli Chemda correlates this implication with the words of Rav Nachman of Breslov in his Sefer HaMidos (Emes - letter nun) that there is no prohibition of lying if it is writing. The Kli Chemda writes “Heaven forbid that one say such a thing!” He concludes that it must have been an erring student.

The aforementioned Maharshah asks how it could be that Moshe Rabbeinu who wrote the Torah could write the words “And Moshe died” – when it did not happen yet. He concludes that Moshe Rabbeinu made two changes – that he did not actually say the words aloud and that it was not written in ink but rather in tears. The combination of these two factors, according to the Maharsha’s understanding – would negate the problem of mechzei k’shikra – the appearance of a lie.

Rav Plotzki’s conclusion that it must have been written by an erring student clearly refers to the citation of Rav Nachman. [This author suggests that if one looks at the context of Rav Nachman’s surrounding statements – both before and after, it

is quite likely that there was both a copying error and a rewording of Rav Nachman’s original words and that he actually had said that the prohibition applies even in writing.]

The halacha based upon the Rishonim and Achronim (Tosfos, Yad Ramah, Chedvas Yaakov, Bais Efraim) is that it is definitely forbidden to lie in writing as well. Indeed, because it involves an actual “action” many Poskim rule that it is even worse than lying merely with the mouth.

### Mussar – Introspection

This week we continue with Chapter Two of our translation of the Chofetz Chaim’s Sefer entitled, “Sfas Tamim.”

It further states (Iyov 34:10), ‘I testify before the Heavens and earth that people do not gather unto death nor does any created being enter into pain – were it not for [excessive seeking of] eating, drinking and merriment – he, his wife, children and household members – until he dies.’ (The meaning is that the evil inclination shows him various rationalizations to say all sorts of lies and do all sorts of evils, to steal, to afflict, to deceive in order that he and his household should conduct themselves as wealthy people.)

The truth is that this is NOT [following] the ways of Hashem – rather each person must conduct himself in terms of expenses according to his own income, as we will explain later – therefore, a person who acts in the opposite manner will be punished. A man’s fruits and produce only rot on account of the conduct of mankind – people come to embarrassment on account of their conduct. A person’s compromised sight later in life is on account of his actions.

The rest of the work I have copied below, *ibid*. The meaning is that through lying and the incorrect actions that man takes up - bring him to such things. [\*The translator suggests that the incorrect actions implied here in regard to blindness as the pursuit of excess foods discussed earlier based on the Rambam in Hilchos Dayos that illnesses are the result of improper eating.]